The future of electronic health applications may be as close as a bird chirping outside your window.

Janice Probst, a leading researcher in rural health disparities, asked participants at the ninth annual Jean Mills Health Symposium on Friday, March 1 to imagine a system like eBird.

Launched by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society in 2002, eBird is a real-time data resource that allows citizens to contribute their bird sightings for use in science and conservation. When it launched, the site had about 50,000 observations per month. Now, it has 1 million bird observations on average each month, growing by about 40 percent each year.

Tracking and managing the health care of patients in a similar way to the birding application could be transformative, Probst said.

"Can you imagine if we could do it for asthma, which has internal and environmental triggers, or if we could do it for congestive heart failure and link it to fast-food places?" Probst said. "When you really get people engaged, they’re doing the science."

An uptick in bird observations on the eBird site came after the organizers found out what birders wanted, not what scientists thought they wanted. "We’ve got to be doing community-based development work here," Probst said. "If you’re not talking to people who will be using it, you’re doomed."

For Probst, who started out in computer programming in the 1970s, the idea is fascinating, she said. "This is the promise of e-health," she said.

Probst, the keynote speaker for the symposium, leads the federally-funded South Carolina Rural Health Research Center and is a professor in the Department of Health Services Policy and Management in the Arnold School of Public Health at the University of South Carolina.

Backed by research, charts and graphs, Probst demonstrated that social inequities lead to health inequities. Rural minority populations experience significant inequities in access to providers, financial access to care and social determinants in general.

The theme of this year’s Mills symposium, “Enhancing Minority Health in the Millennium” featured sessions on reaching underserved areas and improving health care outcomes with the use

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of technology and cultivating campus-community health partnerships in reducing health disparities.

Much of North Carolina has broadband coverage, even in many rural areas, although about 66 percent of people in rural areas nationwide don’t have smart phones, Probst said.

The state’s physicians are also leaders in e-prescribing, ranking in the top 10 percent in the nation, Probst said.

“E-interventions are multiplying,” she said, noting the availability of glucose monitoring from phones to “Asthmaopolis,” a mobile application and sensor that can help people track their symptoms, triggers and use of medications. There’s even an app for diagnosing melanoma. But she said there is no FDA regulation for smart phone applications at this time, so people should be cautious with the growing field that is still being tested.

Attendees at the symposium included ECU occupational therapy faculty members Debbie Amini and Annette Jones. “We’re interested in preventative care and ensuring people have access to care so they can participate in life endeavors,” Jones said.

Jean Elaine Mills, the symposium’s namesake, earned her master’s degree in public administration with a concentration in community health from ECU in 1984. She died of breast cancer in 2000. Her brother, Amos T. Mills, created the symposium in an effort to keep her spirit of discovery and community outreach alive through an inspirational tribute to one of her former graduate school instructors, Dr. Donald Ensley, former chairman of the Department of Community Health in the College of Allied Health Sciences.

“We have an obligation to make the lives of those around us better,” Mills said. “Health care is the most important thing in life.”

The event, held at the East Carolina Heart Institute at ECU, was presented by the College of Allied Health Sciences in collaboration with the ECU Medical & Health Sciences Foundation and the ECU Office of Continuing Studies.

A broadcast of the symposium is available online at http://www.ecu.edu/ah.
HSIM awarded second BB&T grant

The Department of Health Services and Information Management has been awarded a second $10,000 grant from the BB&T Leadership Enhancement Fund titled “Health Care Leadership 2.0: Videos and Social Media for Leadership Development.”

Student teams in HSMA 3050 (Leadership in Health Care) will use social media tools to learn the strategy and practice of social media in health care by interviewing health care leaders in the field.

The current teams will build on projects and information provided by the 2012 HSMA student teams to help them construct interview questions and identify which social media tools are best to conduct the interviews. The social media interviews will be recorded and posted on an on-line module on ECU Blackboard so that the team efforts may be made available to future health services and information management students.

All activities during the project will be supervised and directed according to the ECU social media guidelines. Faculty members involved in the project include Drs. Leigh W. Cellucci, Michael Kennedy, Robert Kulesher, and Xiaoming Zeng.

Student scholarship winners announced

The ECU College of Allied Health Sciences is pleased to recognize 40 students who will receive scholarships totaling $190,839.00 for the 2013-14 academic year.

Each year, thousands of dollars in academic scholarships are awarded to deserving CAHS students. This year, however, was a record year with the largest number of available scholarships, the largest number of applicants, and the largest dollar-amount awarded.

We wish to congratulate all of our award recipients as well as all of our applicants and wish them all the best in their studies this fall!

The full list of names and scholarships can be found here.

100% pass rates!

Congratulations to the Departments of Clinical Laboratory Science, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Physician Assistant Studies!

The 2012 classes all achieved a 100% pass rate on their national certification exams.

Counseling program ranked by U.S. News

The rehabilitation and career counseling program in the ECU College of Allied Health Sciences was ranked 13th among such programs by the U.S. News & World Report.

"I am not surprised that our program continues to be ranked among the best," said Dr. Paul Toriello, chair of doctoral and graduate programs in the Department of Addictions and Rehabilitation Studies. "Our faculty, students and graduates are of the highest caliber, and I am glad the U.S. News & World Report recognizes the quality of our program."

The master's degree program in rehabilitation and career counseling teaches counseling and rehabilitation theories, applied counseling approaches and the clinical skills necessary for professionals to assist individuals with disabilities achieve their maximum level of physical, psychological, social, vocational and economic potential.

The doctoral program in rehabilitation counseling allows students to specialize in substance and clinical counseling, vocational evaluation or rehabilitation research.
Congratulations grads!

The College of Allied Health Sciences held its convocation at 3 p.m. Saturday in Minges Coliseum. The college graduated 228 students. Of those, 138 received bachelor's degrees, 60 received master's degrees, and 29 received doctorates in physical therapy and one received a doctorate in rehabilitation counseling and administration. The speaker was Dr. Phyllis Horns, vice chancellor for health sciences at ECU. Kelsey Romoser, who graduated with a doctor of physical therapy, gave the farewell from students.
East Carolina University graduated its final class of Health Information Management students on May 10, 2013. The graduation ended a long history of educating close to 600 health information management professionals. The Medical Records Administration department was created in 1970, with Mrs. Peggy Wood as the first chairperson. She remained in that position for 26 years.

In 1993, the department was renamed Health Information Management. It was later expanded to include the BS in Health Services Management, and renamed the Department of Health Services and Information Management in 2002.

Since its beginnings, more than ninety percent of the health information management professionals in eastern NC received a degree from ECU.

The decision to discontinue the bachelor's degree is due to the change in health information technology. In the future, more emphasis will be placed on the sharing of medical information, and computer specialists trained at the graduate level in health informatics will be needed. Accordingly, as one chapter closes, another will open through the MS in Health Informatics and Information Management. The first class of students will enter in fall 2013.

OT students participate in CarFit

Occupational therapy students participated in CarFit, a safety program that gives a quick, comprehensive check on how well a driver and his or her vehicle work together. The event was held Saturday, April 6, 2013.

Geared at older adults but open to everyone, OT students and ECU Professor Anne Dickerson led drivers through a 12-point checklist, recommend car adjustments or adaptations and offered advice on what could make a car "fit" an owner better or enhance safety.

Among the items checked: Is the person positioned correctly in the driver's seat? Can the person reach the pedals easily? Does the person know how to adjust mirrors to remove blind spots?

CarFit was developed by the American Society on Aging, AAA, AARP and the American Occupational Therapy Association.

People over 65 are the fastest-growing population in the US. By 2030, one in five drivers will be age 65 or older with more than 30 million older drivers on the road. Older drivers have the second highest rate of crashes in the nation, after teen-agers.
Faculty in the spotlight

Dr. Robert Kulesher participated in the WITN Doctors on Call program on Wednesday, April 24, 2013. He answered questions about insurance selection and eligibility. The program is co-sponsored by the North Carolina Medical Society and the Pitt County Medical Society.

Robert Kulesher, associate professor, has published an article, Health Reform’s Impact on Federally Qualified Community Health Centers-The Unintended Consequence of Increased Medicaid Enrollment on the Primary Care Medical Home in The Health Care Manager, Volume 32, No. 2, pp. 99-106.

The ECU Department of Physical Therapy would like to welcome Keith Sales, DPT, clinical instructor.

Sales received a Doctor of Physical Therapy from ECU in 2011. His clinical interests encompass vestibular rehabilitation and interventions to improve balance and gait.

He will be working in the physical therapy clinic at the ECU Neurosurgery & Spine Center.

Natalie Smith, MS, PA-C, clinical assistant professor, has joined the faculty of East Carolina University in the Department of Physician Assistant Studies. Natalie Smith is a practicing physician assistant in emergency medicine, also with experience in urgent care medicine. In addition to practicing clinically and being a full time didactic faculty member, she is currently building upon her undergraduate interest in business by pursuing her MBA from East Carolina University.

Smith is originally from Apex, NC but fell in love with eastern North Carolina while attending East Carolina University where she met her husband as an undergraduate student. She is excited to be back at her alma mater in the professorial role and is enjoying teaching medicine to future generations of PA’s.

Smith and her husband reside in New Bern, NC where they enjoy eastern North Carolina’s laidback lifestyle, watching pirate football and weekends on the water.

Three OT faculty received awards from the American Occupational Therapy Association annual conference held April 25-28, 2013.

Dr. Denise Donica was awarded a Recognition of Achievement award for her outstanding contributions in handwriting research and education. She also received a 2013 AOTA Service Commendation.

Dr. Debbie Amini received a 2013 AOTA Service Commendation.

Dr. Anne Dickerson was presented with a 2013 AOTA Service Commendation.

Dr. Walt Jenkins, Chair, was featured the April 2013 edition of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) Sports Physical Therapy Section newsletter.

About the Alliance

Formerly an annual/bi-annual alumni magazine, the Alliance is now a quarterly newsletter.

It is designed to connect, engage and inform alumni, faculty, staff and friends of the College of Allied Health Sciences.

You can read past issues of the Alliance on the College of Allied Health Sciences website: www.ecu.edu/ah.

We welcome your emails and comments. Please contact us at robersonk@ecu.edu or 252-744-6014.